

# Analyzing Primary Sources Activity

The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a circular, web-like structure.

## The Politics of Protest, 1960–1980

### The Equal Rights Amendment

#### Background

In 1972 Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This proposed amendment would have made women and men equal under the law. Fierce debate raged between supporters and opponents of the ERA. Ultimately, the amendment failed in 1982 for lack of ratification by the necessary 38 states.

**Directions:** Read the following primary sources in support of and in opposition to the ERA. The first is by Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, who supported the amendment. The second is by conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly, who opposed the amendment. After you've read the sources, answer the questions that follow.

More than half of the population of the United States is female. But women occupy only 2 percent of the managerial positions. They have not even reached the level of tokenism yet. No women sit on the AFL-CIO council or Supreme Court. There have been only two women who have held Cabinet rank, and at present there are none. Only two women now hold ambassadorial rank in the diplomatic corps. In Congress, we are down to one Senator and 10 Representatives.

Considering that there are about 3 1/2 million more women in the United States than men, this situation is outrageous.

It is for this reason that I wish to introduce today a proposal that has been before every Congress for the last 40 years and that sooner or later must become part of the basic law of the land—the equal rights amendment.

Let me note and try to refute two of the commonest arguments that are offered against this amendment. One is that women are already protected under the law and do not need legislation. Existing laws are not adequate to secure equal rights for women. Sufficient proof of this is the concentration of women in lower paying, menial, unrewarding jobs and their incredible scarcity in the upper level jobs. If women are already equal, why is it such an event whenever one happens to be elected to Congress?

A second argument often heard against the equal rights amendment is that it would eliminate legislation that many States and the Federal Government have enacted giving special protection to women and that it would throw the marriage and divorce laws into chaos.

Women need no protection that men do not need. What we need are laws to protect working people, to guarantee them fair pay, safe working conditions, protection against sickness and layoffs, and provision for dignified, comfortable retirement. Men and women need these things equally.

—Shirley Chisholm, "Address To The United States House Of Representatives," May 21, 1969

# Analyzing Primary Sources

## Activity *Cont.*

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### The Politics of Protest, 1960–1980

It's time to set the record straight. The claim that American women are downtrodden and unfairly treated is the fraud of the century. The truth is that American women have never had it so good. Why should we lower ourselves to "equal rights" when we already have the status of special privilege?

The proposed Equal Rights Amendment states: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." So what's wrong with that? Well, here are a few examples of what's wrong with it.

This amendment will absolutely and positively make women subject to the [military] draft. Why any woman would support such a ridiculous and un-American proposal as this is beyond comprehension. Why any Congressman who had any regard for his wife, sister, or daughter would support such a proposition is just as hard to understand. Foxholes are bad enough for men, but they certainly are not the place for women—and we should reject any proposal which would put them there in the name of equal rights. . . .

The "women's lib" movement is not an honest effort to secure better jobs for women who want or need to work outside the home. This is just the superficial sweet-talk to win broad support for a radical "movement."

"Women's lib" is a total assault on the role of the American woman as wife and mother, and on the family as the basic unit of society. . . .

Women's libbers do *not* speak for the majority of American women. American women do *not* want to be liberated from husbands and children. We do *not* want to trade our birthright of the special privilege of American women—for the mess of pottage called the Equal Rights Amendment.

—Phyllis Schlafly, "What's Wrong with Equal Rights for Women?"  
February 1972

### Critical Thinking

1. What is the difference in focus between the two sources?
2. How does Chisholm answer the argument that women's rights are already protected and they do not need special legislation?
3. What does Schlafly regard as the "special privilege" of American women?
4. What is Schlafly implying in the first paragraph of the second excerpt?